

Midterm Elections in the United States 2006

Every two years Americans elect members of the House of Representatives to two-year terms and about one-third of their Senators, who serve six-year terms. The elections in which Americans vote for their congressional representatives, but not for president, are known as midterm elections. They occur every four years.

Because each of the three branches of the American government

—executive, legislative and judicial—is an equal force in the U.S. system of "checks and balances," whether the Republicans or Democrats control the houses of Congress is of vital importance.

Although the president sets the political agenda for the country, Congress has an enormous influence on whether or not an administration can accomplish its goals. The houses of Congress alone have the power to pass legislation, approve or deny appointments of cabinet department executives, ambassadors and judges, provide oversight of—and investigate—government agencies, ratify treaties, regulate commerce, control taxation and spending policies, declare war and approve funding for the military.

The Congressional Race

Currently, President Bush's Republican Party controls both the House and the Senate of the Congress. Republicans have controlled the House since 1994.

In this election, Democrats would need to pick up 15 seats to take control of the House.

Out of the 33 Senate seats at stake this year, 18 are defended by Democrats and 15 seats by Republicans.

The Official List of Nominees for the Office of U.S. Senator and for the Office of U.S. Representative in the 110th Congress is available on the web site of the Office of the Clerk at http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/2006/nominees_110th.pdf

In the United States, election administration is conducted at the state and local levels, typically overseen by government officials. The **Federal Election Commission (FEC)** enforces campaign finance laws. To learn more about campaign finance, visit the FEC web site at

<http://www.fec.gov/>.

Voting technology varies by county in each state: from paper ballots to mechanical levers (voters pull



A touch-screen voting machine
(AP Photo/Phil Coale)

a machine lever to mark their choices) and from optical scans (voters fill in a machine-readable ballot)

to Direct-Recording Electronic Systems or DREs (voters use touch-screen or push-button machines) many technologies will be applied. A list of voting technologies by state is available on the web site of electionline.org at

<http://electionline.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1099>

Foreign Policy in the Elections

The 2006 midterms are noteworthy not only because control of Congress might be tipped from one party to the other, but also because they are the first elections in many years in which the key issues driving campaigns involve U.S. foreign policy, including the war in Iraq and the War on Terror. In addition, important domestic concerns are linked to foreign policy, such as energy supplies and homeland security. Learn more about this topic and other aspect of the elections at the Midterm Elections page of U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Information Programs at <http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/democracy/elections.html>.

Congressional Profile:

House membership:

435 Members
4 Delegates
1 Resident Commissioner

Party Divisions:

230 Republicans
201 Democrats
1 Independent
3 Vacancies

Senate Membership:

100 Senators
(Vice President votes in case of a tie)

Party Divisions:

55 Republicans
44 Democrats
1 Independent

Information Resource Center Jakarta

Redistricting is also a factor in Congressional elections. Because the House of Representatives is based on state population, the Congressional districts in each state are usually re-drawn according to the population information obtained in the U.S. census conducted every 10 years. The party holding the majority of seats in each state's legislature at that time controls the redistricting process and often uses that power to draw the new district lines in ways that favor its candidates. This is known as "gerrymandering." (see map)



To view the the present congressional districts, visit: <http://nationalatlas.gov/printable/congress.html>

Governors' Races

There are 36 governorships up for election in November, with Democrats defending 14 seats and Republicans defending 22.

At present, Republicans hold the majority on governorships, with



28 states held by Republican governors, versus 22 held by Democrats.

For a complete list of gubernatorial candidates, interactive map, news stories and polls results, visit the *Governing.com* web site at <http://www.governing.com/govraces/guide.htm>.

Further Sources of Information

U.S. Government Sources:

Midterm Elections page of U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Information Programs: <http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/democracy/elections.html>.

Federal Election Commission: <http://www.fec.gov>

FirstGov Voting and Elections page: <http://www.firstgov.gov/Citizen/Topics/Voting.shtml>

Other Sources:

League of Women Voters: <http://www.lwv.org>

Project Vote Smart: <http://www.vote-smart.org>

The New York Times 2006 Election Guide: <http://www.nytimes.com/ref/washington/2006ELECTIONGUIDE.html>

The Washington Post Campaign 2006: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/politics/elections/>

Yahoo election coverage with interactive maps:

Senate races: <http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/files/specials/interactives/wdc/senate/index.html?SITE=YAHOO&SECTION=HOME>

House races: <http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/files/specials/interactives/wdc/house/index.html?SITE=YAHOO&SECTION=HOME>

Governors' races: <http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/files/specials/interactives/wdc/governors/index.html?N=HOME>



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